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SUBJECT: DAS MADISON VISIT: SLOVENES EAGER TO GET SMART ON CUBA, LATIN AMERICA

Classified By: CDA for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary. Slovenian government officials, academics, and media were eager to learn about USG views on Cuba and Latin America during the May 7-9 visit of DAS Kirsten Madison. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials told Madison they have little expertise on issues in the Western Hemisphere but are working to "get smart" on the region in preparation for Slovenia's more global role as President of the European Union in 2008. On Cuba, MFA officials talked of the need for a unified EU position based on the priority of human rights. On Latin America, MFA officials briefed Madison on Foreign Minister Rupel's recent visit to the region and on plans for future engagement, including the upcoming EU-Latin American Community Summit (EU-LAC) next year. A luncheon and academic coffee rounded out a visit that was largely focused on getting Slovenes up-to-speed on USG views on the region and offering them a chance to begin exploring Cuban and Latin American issues more substantively with the U.S. At the highest levels Slovenian officials are looking for information, suggestions and assistance. Ongoing contact will allow us to influence the Slovenian perspective, advance U.S. foreign policy interests, and push Slovenia to avoid the tendency to adopt a position of neutrality, and take a strong, positive role on Cuba and other topics during its leadership of the EU. End Summary.

**¶2.** (U) Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kirsten Madison visited Ljubljana May 7-9, 2007 to discuss Cuba as well as Central and South American issues with officials from the MFA and Parliament, academia, and the media. Her messages on Cuba and the region helped clarify USG positions and were well received at all levels.

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GOS: Interested in Cuba, but Lacking Experience and Expertise  
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**¶3.** (C) MFA officials were eager to meet with DAS Madison and hear her insights on the state of the Cuban transition, especially her assessment of opposition groups, the regime, and the path forward. Ambassador Roman Kirn, Director of the Americas Department (and former Slovenian Ambassador to the United Nations), was well versed on general aspects of USG policy towards Cuba, but he was also interested in learning more about the internal situation in Cuba and USG activities on the island.

**¶4.** (C) Kirn said Slovenia and the EU should send a clear message of their expectations, but that the EU lacks unity on the issue and is having difficulty defining a common position. Kirn was curious about reactions to Madison's visits in other EU capitals and said the EU "must be united

on the need to have access to the opposition." However, he also stressed that communication and dialogue with the Cuban government is of utmost importance. Kirn noted that Cubans do not seem to be having difficulty gathering support around the world, especially given their chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement. Despite extensive Cuban public relations campaigns in Europe, Kirn said the Cuban regime is probably not influencing many in EU.

¶5. (C) Kirn focused extensively on the need for practical steps to move Cuba forward, commenting repeatedly on the need for incentives to get the Cuban government to allow more openness. However he felt that the EU has few if any incentives, and that the EU can "send a message of support but cannot change anything." In contrast, he felt the US has obvious incentives and "needs to be creative" in using them. Kirn said that there was a certain degree of frustration within the EU regarding the decade old common policy and felt that if the policy was not resulting in change, than maybe it should be reconsidered. He said it was important that the U.S. and EU speak about the "behavior" of the regime, not about "regime change." Kirn asked about the U.S. embargo and reiterated that Slovenia was very supportive of references to Cuba and Latin America in recent joint U.S.-EU statements. Director General of Multilateral Affairs Anita Pipan and State Secretary Andrej Ster echoed Kirn's comments as did Jozef Jerovsek, Chair of the Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee. Jerovsek was complimentary of USG efforts to prepare for the Cuban transition in advance, and was particularly interested in getting a readout on the organization of the opposition on the island, the current mindset of the Cuban regime, and how the USG thinks events will proceed in the near future.

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¶6. (C) At all levels, MFA officials said Slovenia has few bilateral issues and very little expertise on South and Central American affairs but that it wants to learn more about the region and increase bilateral ties. Pipan served in Slovenia's only embassy in the region, Buenos Aires, and is one of the few high level MFA officials with experience in South or Central America. She briefed on Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel's trip to Latin America in April, calling it "an opportunity to get to know the region and to establish contacts" before the EU-LAC Summit. He visited Argentina, Chile, and Peru and held bilateral meetings with colleagues from a half dozen other countries on the margins of the EU-Rio Group meeting in the Dominican Republic. FM Rupel will be returning to the region to visit Brazil in early June and Mexico later this year; the Foreign Minister of Costa Rica will be in Slovenia in late May. Pipan welcomed DAS Madison's visit, asking for more information on USG positions in the region and saying that Slovenia would be a "sponge" soaking up information from allies.

¶7. (C) Madison briefed on President Bush's recent trip to Latin America, trends in the region, and Cuba. Pipan's analysis tracked with Madison's statements, with Pipan noting that in general, the GOS sees two poles emerging in Latin America: one with a liberal, free trade, forward looking, pragmatic, and results-oriented perspective, while the other pole has an interventionist perspective with political rhetoric "a la Castro." Pipan said FM Rupel found Latin American leaders to be "very self confident," particularly in regards to economic, trade, and energy issues. She said leaders were more apprehensive on issues of social cohesion and were particularly cautious on Cuba, advocating gradual steps and a peaceful transition without outside pressure.

¶8. (C) Pipan noted that as President of the EU, Slovenia will be the co-chair of the next EU-Latin American Community (EU-LAC) summit which will be held in Lima, Peru May 16 and 17, 2008 and include the 27 EU states and 33 countries from

South America and the Caribbean. She said that the priority issues are likely to be social justice and climate change, while issues like energy security, migration, and effective multilateralism and regional integration may also be discussed. Pipan said the region seems to be interested in stronger cooperation with the EU and that the meeting may allow the EU to offer its perspectives and assistance on the challenge of regional and subregional integration.

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Slovenian Newspaper, National Radio Cover Visit of DAS Madison  
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¶ 9. (U) Fourth largest national daily "Vecer" (print run of 58,000 with a readership of 141,000) titled its interview with DAS Madison "Positive Role of U.S.A. is Well Understood in South America" and subtitled it "People Who Work for Freedom in Cuba Wish Peaceful Transition and Reconciliation with All Citizens." The interview, carried May 12 on the newspaper's foreign policy page, covered DAS Madison's visit in a straightforward manner and included a straight translation of questions regarding Hugo Chavez and Venezuela, Cuba, and U.S.-EU cooperation in Central and Latin American issues. The taped radio interview with DAS Madison for Radio Slovenia (three stations with a combined reach of 400,000) will most likely air on Saturday, May 19.

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Czech, Hungarian, Polish Ambassadors Join DAS Madison and COM to Weigh in on Cuba  
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¶ 10. (C) COM hosted a spirited luncheon for DAS Madison with State Secretary Ster, Ambassador Kirn, the MFA's working level Cuba staffer Natasha Furlan, and the Czech, Hungarian, and Polish Ambassadors to Slovenia. Given the positive engagement on Cuba from some of Slovenia's central European peers, COM invited them to deliver a unified message that Slovenia should take a proactive role on democracy promotion in Cuba during its EU Presidency, and promote a policy that is in line with the U.S. and central European mindset rather than that of the Spanish.

¶ 11. (C) Czech Ambassador to Slovenia Ivana Hlavsova, a former head of the Americas Department at the Czech MFA, was particularly tough in her condemnation of Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos' visit to Havana and her assessment of Cuba's success in dividing the EU. She politely rebuffed

Ambassador Kirn's opinion that the Moratinos visit had some benefits in terms of dialogue, noting that Moratinos did not meet with dissidents. While a good deal of discussion centered around whether the central European transition experience was relevant to Cuba, all present agreed that the EU had a responsibility to act (with the Czech and Hungarian Ambassadors arguing that central European states should take a leadership role given their recent totalitarian past), and that the EU must have "a strong, harmonized voice on Cuba."

¶ 12. (C) All parties were pleased to have a Cuba expert present and were interested in hearing Madison's take on the current situation in Cuba, the organization and unity of the Cuban opposition, and the role of the Cuban Diaspora, specifically the Cuban-American community. There was nervousness that the Cuban opposition would splinter as transition begins, and that the Cuban-American community is feared as much as looked to for assistance by the Cuban public. The Czech Ambassador also inquired about the USG opinion on Latin America's relations with Cuba, what they are thinking, doing, and saying, and whether they will take a coherent regional approach after Castro's departure.

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Engaging Slovenian Academia on Cuba  
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¶13. (C) American Studies Graduate Program Chair Dr. Bogomil Ferfilla, International Studies Graduate Program Chair Dr. Bojko Bucar, and Defense Studies Chair Dr. Anton Bebler, all from the University of Ljubljana, were curious about the current economic, political, and social situation in Cuba, the state of the Cuban opposition, how USG-Cuban relations operate, and what the USG is doing to promote democracy in Cuba. Though all three are generally supportive of U.S. foreign policy, they criticized the embargo, with Bucar noting that opening up the system economically caused things to collapse in central and eastern Europe and that the USG could similarly prompt change in Cuba with economic openness.

In response to Madison's comments that USG policy is dependent on positive actions coming from the regime, all three urged the USG to pursue a policy "leading" instead of "reacting to" changes on the island. Ferfilla shared his experiences traveling in Cuba and noted that, like Iranians, the general population in Cuba seems to be very pro-American.

¶14. (C) When asked how the GOS will "get smart" on Cuba and Latin America, the three agreed that Slovenia will look extensively to larger players within the EU (especially France and Germany) for guidance and will "farm out" much of the work to countries with more experience. For example, they felt that Slovenia would look to Spain for guidance on Latin America and France for guidance on Africa, saying this would be "the only way that the GOS can handle the amount of work." Note: FM Rupel announced in Peru that the GOS will work on EU-LAC Summit issues through the French Embassy in Lima because it lacks an Embassy presence there. End Note. Bucar, with agreement of the others, said that very little original thinking should be expected out of the MFA during the EU Presidency.

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¶15. (C) Unlike other central and eastern European countries, Slovenia has remained largely unengaged in Cuba primarily because it lacks a diplomatic presence. Likewise, its connection to Latin America is almost exclusively based on the small Slovenian Diaspora in Argentina. The MFA's strong interest in DAS Madison's visit highlights the GOS's curiosity and its nervousness about taking a role on the world stage and engaging on issues that previously were of only peripheral interest. DAS Madison's visit, coming just days after a DVC between FM Rupel and NEA PDAS Jeffrey, is a further sign that the GOS is open to and appreciative of USG engagement on a wide range of topics in the run up to the EU Presidency. At the highest levels, Slovenian officials are looking for information, ideas and assistance. During his meeting with Madison, Ster noted that the "challenge of the EU Presidency is global, and we appreciate an exchange of information with countries who are in the know." The positive reception to Madison's message shows how ongoing contact from the USG will allow us to influence the Slovenian perspective, advance U.S. foreign policy interests, and push Slovenia to avoid the tendency to adopt a position of neutrality on difficult issues and take a strong, positive role in its leadership of the EU.

¶16. (U) DAS Madison has cleared on this cable.  
COLEMAN